



SUCCESS STORY

Madrasa Students Receive Lessons on Constitutional Rights and Obligations

Madrasa students in southern Kyrgyzstan learn from a USAID-supported program.



Female students at a lesson on religious rights and tolerance in Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan.
Photo: ABA/CEELI

"For us religious laws are above all, but still we want to know the laws of the country we live in to protect our rights,"

- Kyz-Jibek, a 16 year-old madrasa female student, speaking of the Street Law classes.

A class of 35 girls, ages 14 to 17, at a madrasa in Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan, is immersed in a debate on the merits of a democratic form of government. "Could a democratic society vote for Islam as its official religion?" one student challenges her friends.

Scenes like this have grown increasingly common in Kyrgyzstan's Islamic schools -- madrasas -- since February 2006, when USAID reached an agreement with an Osh imam, arranging for madrasa students to learn about religious rights and tolerance, democracy and the law, social norms, and constitutional and criminal law. Throughout the spring, USAID-sponsored Street Law program (implemented by ABA/CEELI) has taught these topics to groups of girls and boys in separate classrooms at two madrasas in Southern Kyrgyzstan.

The first madrasa to give approval for Street Law was the Islamic Institute of Osh ("Osh madrasa"). In the Osh madrasa the Street Law program, together with law students from local university, conducted 14 lessons for two classes - one with 30 male and another with 35 female students - on topics, like

constitutional rights and freedoms, constitutional obligations, the rights and duties of the police, and what a citizen should do if they are stopped by the police. The madrasa students became more active and engaged as the lessons progressed. "For us religious laws are above all, but still we want to know the laws of the country we live in to protect our rights," says Kyz-Jibek, a 16 year old madrasa female student speaking of the Street Law classes.

The same spring, street law expanded to a madrasa in Jalalabat Oblast, where more than 20 teachers have requested lessons on interactive methods of teaching, working in small groups, and open questions. The USAID-supported Street Law program is planning to introduce their lessons in more madrasas in Osh and Jalalabat, as well as other parts of the country.